

VZCZCXRO6858

PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #1090/01 1121519
ZNY CCCCC ZZH ZDK CTG SEVERAL SERVICES
P 221519Z APR 09
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2809
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/CJCS WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/DIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHINGTON DC//NSC//

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001090

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/21/2014

TAGS: I2 PREF PGOV PREL

SUBJECT: SOME DISPLACED FAMILIES RETURN TO MIXED BAGHDAD
NEIGHBORHOOD, BUT GOVERNMENT SUPPORT LACKING

BAGHDAD 00001090 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Deputy Polcouns John G. Fox, 1.4 b/d.

11. (C) SUMMARY: Embassy Polloff, Embedded PRT governance specialist and Coalition Force (CF) leaders met on April 19 in Baghdad's Hurriya section with local Iraqi officials, area sheikhs and Iraqi Army (IA) officers involved in the resettlement of internally displaced (IDP) families. Hurriya had been the scene of some of the most intense sectarian violence in 2006 and 2007. Of 7,500 mainly Sunni families displaced from Hurriya, the IA battalion commander estimated 713 families had returned, 114 homes remained empty and another 60 were part of an exchange program. Attacks directed at the returnees had so far been limited; he noted, however, that many families had not yet registered with the IA. Area sheikhs stressed their active role in the reconciliation process, including facilitating payments of "blood money" for past deaths. All Iraqi participants in the meetings criticized the lack of GOI follow-up on promises made to IDP families, with the IA commander remarking that "only 50-75 families have received the one million dinar payment" promised to them. Some sheikhs suggested quicker repairs to area Sunni mosques as the best means to attract more IDPs to return home. END SUMMARY.

ESTIMATED RETURN DATA; SOME
BACK, NOT ALL REGISTERED

12. (C) The Hurriya section of Baghdad witnessed some of the most violent episodes of the sectarian violence that dominated the area in 2006-2007. The mixed neighborhood experienced a large displacement of Sunni families, with JAM militias openly operating in the area pre-surge. The IA battalion commander based there said Hurriya still suffered from "misperceptions" that it remained a dangerous and unstable area. He stressed, however, that 713 families had returned, with only a few incidents of violence directed against them (three homes burned, three people killed -- though these cases could not be unquestionably linked to the victims' IDP status -- and four grenades thrown at homes where families had returned). NOTE: None of the Iraqis could estimate the percentage of IDP families who had returned to Hurriya, citing the lack of any accurate census, and other families in the area who were living in make-shift camps but not necessarily originally from the area. END NOTE.

¶3. (SBU) The IA commander said his soldiers conducted regular patrols in areas where families had returned, sometimes with coalition units. He said promised GOI payments (one million dinar) to IDP families were lacking; only 50-75 families had received the funds. Work by the local district council, NGOs, and some assistance by CF had eased IDP transition but more needed to be done by the government.

COMPLAINTS: GOI'S UNKEPT
PROMISES TO DISPLACED

¶4. (SBU) The IA commander and five local sheikhs criticized the GOI and its failed promises of support for IDPs in Hurriya. The sheikhs' council had been active, they said, in ensuring reconciliation in the neighborhood, including payments of "blood money" where needed. The leading sheikh noted that one family in Hurriya had lost 13 members from Qnoted that one family in Hurriya had lost 13 members from past violence, another 27, but they had returned. The sheikhs' attempts to get more Provincial Council attention had not been successful, though they noted that the new PC would include four members from Hurriya. NOTE: They did not indicate whether these new PC representatives were Sunni or Shia; Hurriya had been mostly Sunni; most did not or could not vote. END NOTE.

¶5. (SBU) The head of the local IDP committee (a woman who sits on the Khadimiyah District Advisory Council) urged the U.S. to press the government on greater IDP support. Her past sessions with the PM's advisor had not led to improvements, though the government had discussed increasing

BAGHDAD 00001090 002.2 OF 002

grants to returnees from one million dinar per family to five million dinar. She said the top priorities should be educational programs for returnees, as well as psychological support programs for children "who had seen so much violence at such a young age."

SUGGESTIONS: FIX THE
MOSQUES; HOME SALES?

¶6. (SBU) The group suggested some immediate steps be taken to encourage more IDPs to return to Hurriya. Mosque repair and reopening might convince more displaced residents that restoring their community was viable. Similarly, projects to improve infrastructure were needed. One sheikh loudly complained that "some streets in Hurriya look like Darfur." The sheikhs' council said residents suffered from "no electricity, low water pressure and broken sewer systems." The old PC had not been very responsive to IDP or infrastructure concerns; only time would tell if the new council would be, with one sheikh remarking, "We will see what the new Provincial Council does."

¶7. (U) A local official urged that all home sales in Hurriya be stopped in order to ensure that some owners were not being forced to sell. The IA commander said that such an approach had been tried in other Baghdad neighborhoods but eventually stopped because it had been ruled illegal. The IA would, he added, be willing to meet with area real-estate agents to ensure that they were not acting in a sectarian manner.

COMMENT

¶8. (C) While the precise number of returns to Hurriya is

unclear, given some undocumented returns, it is a small minority of the population displaced from the area. Nevertheless, the inflow so far appears to confirm that some measure of confidence has returned among this population. The lack of GOI follow-up (and associated complaints about poor infrastructure), however, could hinder wider returns. The strong CF-IA partnership in Hurriya will be tested as the U.S. army unit leaves the area in line with the Security Agreement's June deadline. A planned follow-on visit by Embassy, EPRT, and CF representatives to meet with displaced families at their homes should help clarify the extent to which government outreach to them has been minimally successful, or still greatly lacking -- as the assembled Iraqis charged. In a telling, final comment, the IA battalion commander somewhat sarcastically told Poloff at the end of the meeting, "thank you for taking their message to our government" -- reinforcing the gap that remains between the people, not least the displaced among them, and their elected representatives.

BUTENIS